Meet the ScreenFlow-er: David Besozzi, Educator

ScreenFlow in Education

David Besozzi is a National Board Certified secondary social studies teacher in New York who uses screencasting as a fundamental part of his curriculum. He has (so far) created 86 screencasts for his Global History and Geography course and 12 for his Psychology elective. Through incorporating screencasting into his lessons, he has been able to have a more hands-on approach in the classroom, as well as give students more autonomy over their own learning.

How long have you been screencasting and approximately how many screencasts have you made?

I first started using ScreenFlow in April of 2009. Since that time I have created 86 screencasts for my Global History and Geography course and 12 for my Psychology elective.

I began the Global screencasts after discovering ScreenFlow and began assigning them to my students as early as April 2009 on a trial basis. Initial student reaction was positive, so I continued to develop more throughout the second semester. I committed myself to creating screencasts for all of my Global lessons during the summer of 2009 and had completed most of the 86 by January of 2010.

For what purposes to do you make your screencasts? Who watches your screencasts, and how do they access them?

I developed screencasts to help in the delivery of content to my students. 9th grade Global History and Geography students are currently viewing 4 to 5 screencasts every two weeks.

We do not use the screencasts in class as instruction. Instead, students access them via a web browser at two sites: YouTube and SchoolTube. These screencasts are assigned for homework and students view them at their own pace outside of class. The intention is to provide students with access to the necessary content prior to lesson activities during the scheduled class meeting time. This allows me to conduct class in a more "hands-on" way,

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similar to a lab in a science class. Instead of students sitting passively in class taking notes, they can acquire the notes via the screencasts at home, and then employ that information as part of the class activities upon their return. The screencasts, therefore, help to provide students with a high degree of autonomy over their learning.

What kind of studio or set up do you have? Do you have a photo of your setup?

As a public school teacher, resources are limited. My initial attempts were conducted using a MacBook and Logitech external microphone. I created screencasts whenever time permitted and in whatever locations I happened to be – the public library, empty classrooms at school, or my home.

In order to improve the quality of the finished products and more fully commit myself to the screencasting endeavor, I submitted a grant to the Burnt Hills–Ballston Lake Education Foundation, a local foundation that provides financial support to educators looking to pursue pedagogical interest beyond the standard curricular approaches. With their support, I was able to acquire the funds to purchase a Mac-Mini and a license for ScreenFlow software. Coupled with existing equipment in my classroom (a Smart Technologies Sympodium interactive display from a previous BHBL Education Foundation grant) and hardware brought in from home, I was able to begin the process of screencasting. However, I quickly realized that appearance was important – there wasn't much I could do about my own appearance, but my dress and the background could be improved. During the summer of 2009 I set up the equipment in a room with dark green walls. With a simple light fixture aimed at just the right angle, I was able to produce enough light on myself and create the illusion of a dark background. Not quite professional Hollywood, but on a budget of zero, not bad.

What do you find to be the most challenging aspect of creating your screencasts?

Finding ways to incorporate my appearance into existing PowerPoint presentations. Most of my PowerPoints had been created over a period of several years. They were never intended for use as screencasts. Finding ways to move my ScreenFlow-created video image to different locations that would not distract from the text and images on the screen was a concern. However, the tools in ScreenFlow negated those concerns. The ease by which I could manipulate and move images from the screen capture and or the video camera capture helped to make the transition from simple PowerPoint presentations to screencasts a breeze.

Are there processes you've changed as you've gotten more experienced?

Starting off was haphazard – I was new to this medium and didn't consider the appearance of the environment in which I recorded my own appearance. I initially recorded whenever and wherever I had the opportunity. By switching to a constant an unchanging background, I was able to ensure more consistency. I eventually began to wear the same shirt for each set of screencasts I developed for individual units. Students are very conscious of appearance and dress and often remind me of my lack of fashion sense – especially in my early screencasts.

I have come to realize that developing a large number of screencasts requires some strategic and long term planning – where to record, what to wear, and how to behave, all play a part in the screencasts effectiveness in maintaining student interest. In fact, many students have asked that I move beyond lecture and develop more lively screencasts.

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What advice would you give to other educators that want to use screencasting to enhance student learning experiences?

I always tell educators that they need to find hardware and software solution with which they are comfortable, especially if they are new to technology or screencasting. Without hesitation, I always try to point them to ScreenFlow, not simply because I am a Mac advocate, but because of its ease of use and capabilities. Without a doubt, ScreenFlow is the best product on the market for creating this sort of curricular resource. Additionally, my students have responded positively to the use of screencasting as an instructional device.

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